

STATEMENT OF JOHN J. REYNOLDS, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PACIFIC WEST REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 1712, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO MAKE MINOR ADJUSTMENTS TO THE BOUNDARY OF THE NATIONAL PARK OF AMERICAN SAMOA TO INCLUDE CERTAIN PORTIONS OF THE ISLANDS OF OFU AND OLOSEGA WITHIN THE PARK.

February 14, 2002

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1712, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to make minor adjustments to the boundary of the National Park of American Samoa, to include certain lands of the islands of Ofu and Olosega within the park, and for other purposes.

The Department does not oppose H.R. 1712. We do, however, suggest amendments as outlined in this testimony. This legislation will provide authority for the Secretary of the Interior to adjust the boundary of the National Park of American Samoa to include up to approximately 1,000 acres of land on the island of Olosega, up to approximately 450 acres on the island of Ofu, and approximately 1,500 acres of ocean waters offshore of Olosega and Ofu. The lands on the island of Olosega and the adjacent offshore waters will add important cultural, biological and marine resources to the national park. The lands on the island of Ofu will ensure the long-term protection of important and fragile coral reef resources presently within the national park.

Proposed additions on Ofu contain excellent wildlife and coral reef habitats. Currently, only a strip of sand beach and the associated coral reef are within the national park boundary on Ofu. This coastal area contains a world-class coral reef area of remarkably high diversity and beauty. The proposed addition would protect the upland watershed so that the coral reef would not be impaired by non-park developments. Coastal areas on the north side of Ofu are proposed because of the exceptionally healthy and diverse coral communities found there, and because the north shores of Ofu and Olosega are connected and constitute a single coral reef ecosystem.

The archeological resources found on Olosega between the 300 and 800-foot elevations are not only important, but are unique in American Samoa. Unique to Olosega are the number of star mounds and what appears to be a remnant agro-forestry system. Archeological reconnaissance surveys carried out on Olosega in July 1999 by the National Park Service and the University of North Dakota's Department of Anthropology identified 31 star mounds, 46 modified terraces, 14 house platforms, an elevated grave site believed to be associated with the Tui Olosega (King of Olosega), and numerous stone tools. Star mounds are massive rock platforms with radiating arms built by the ancient Samomans for cultural and sporting events. Up until 1999, star mounds were known to exist only on Upolo (in Samoa) and Tutuila islands. Archeologists believe the agro-forestry system found on Olosega, with further study, could prove to be an agricultural system that existed in relative equilibrium with the native forest system. Most of the sites and artifacts found on Olosega were well preserved.

Also in 1999, a survey of Olosega's biotic resources by the park's wildlife biologist found that the unoccupied portions of the island provide excellent habitat for native wildlife. Large tracts of land on Olosega remain relatively wild and the island is free of many of the introduced species that compete with

the native wildlife within the park on Tutuila. In addition, Olosega includes the presence of the rarer bird species that occur in American Samoa. Fiji shrikebill, uncommon on the other islands, were consistently seen on Olosega during the 1999 survey. The Friendly ground dove and the Blue-crowned lory are also present. The Friendly ground dove is a candidate for listing as an endangered species. Biologists believe the shrikebill found on Olosega may be a separate subspecies found only on the Manu'a Islands.

Although Olosega shares the same fauna found on the other islands of American Samoa, the species composition of the forest trees is somewhat unique. The 1999 survey found a high concentration of Samoan medicinal plants. Many of these medicinal plants are disappearing from the native forests of Samoa. The survey also found that the area between the 200 and 800-foot elevation represented a traditional mixed agro-forestry system developed over decades of manipulation and cultural use. The system appeared to be relatively stable and may have reached a sustainable equilibrium.

Small populations of two species of flying foxes are believed to exist on Olosega. Protection of these fruit-eating bats is included in the park's enabling legislation. In addition, there are indications that a few individuals of the nearly extirpated sheath-tailed bat are present on Olosega. This small insectivorous bat is a candidate for listing as an endangered species and is not currently found within the existing boundary of the park.

The coastal and marine areas of Olosega contain rich coral and fish communities and would complement the Ofu reef currently included within the park boundary. Surveys have found that Olosega's offshore waters are among the richest and most densely populated with fish species in the entire Samoan archipelago. Both the endangered Hawksbill and the threatened Green sea turtles are present in Olosega's offshore waters. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service believe that the Hawksbill turtle is a species rapidly approaching extinction, making its protection in Olosega's reefs and offshore waters of vital importance.

The law that established the National Park of American Samoa does not provide the authority for the National Park Service to acquire park lands, but instead requires that lands must be leased from the Governor of American Samoa. Lands within the authorized boundary expansion would be added to the park incrementally, based on future discussions with village landowners and modification of the existing lease. The park's enabling legislation places the responsibility for determining the rental value of lands to be leased for the national park with the High Court of American Samoa. As a point of reference, the park currently leases approximately 8,000 acres for \$419,000 annually. The offshore waters would be leased from the Government of American Samoa at no cost. No development is contemplated within the boundary adjustment areas, so no line-item construction or significant development costs are anticipated in connection with H.R. 1712.

In March 1998, the Olosenga Village Council noted in a letter to American Samoa's Congressional representative, Congressman Eni F.H. Faleomavaega, that the national park has contributed much to the preservation of Samoan culture, the rainforest and the coral reef. In addition, the council noted that the park has also been a positive factor to the economic well-being of the territory through tourism and lease payments to the villages in the park. The village council of Olosega expressed its support for expansion of the park boundaries, and we are pleased that this has been a grassroots effort supported by the community.

Also significant would be inclusion of the coral reefs around portions of Olosega within the national park, which would further the Governor's directive to local agencies to protect 20 percent of the territory's coral reefs. At present, only about six percent of the territory's reefs are in protected areas.

We recommend an amendment to the bill to eliminate the word "minor" when referring to the boundary adjustment. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF), as amended, provides the Secretary of the Interior with the authority to make minor boundary adjustments, and defines the conditions that are considered to be minor. Because the boundary adjustment addressed by H.R. 1712 would not meet those criteria, we suggest that the term be deleted from the bill in order to avoid confusion between its use in H.R. 1712 and the definition provided in the LWCF.

We also recommend an amendment to include a map reference in the bill in order to clarify the lands to be included in the boundary adjustment. Both of the suggested amendments are attached to this testimony.

This concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions that you or members of the subcommittee may have.

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